

SSSP AS THE ORGANIZATION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

HERBERT A. AURBACH (1/21/76)

(SSSP Executive Officer)

I share much of the Lees' concern about the inadequacy of the Society's efforts to expand academic opportunities and protect the jobs of minorities, radicals, and other "deprived" groups. In the past, a major reason for this inadequacy may have been the inability to recruit into the Society a substantial number of members from most of these groups. Perhaps even more important has been the underrepresentation of these groups in the leadership of SSSP. Among the groups specified by the Lees, only women have comprised a significant proportion of our membership and until recently they too were grossly underrepresented in leadership roles (although not nearly as underrepresented as in most professional organizations, e.g., the ASA). During the past two or three years, as women have become considerably more active in positions of leadership and responsibility in SSSP, there has been a parallel increase in the content on problems of women in society at our annual meetings and in our journal. There is every reason to believe that in the near future, attention will be directed to the special problems of women in academia.

Similarly, there has been a noticeable increase in the participation of our younger and more radically oriented colleagues in positions of responsibility during the past two years. This is most apparent in the leadership of several of our divisions and the nominees for the 1976 general elections of SSSP. Again, this trend has been reflected in the content of our meetings and in our journal. Moreover, both of the above trends are reflected in the establishment of a Committee on Unemployment in the Profession, specifically charged, among other things, with considering what action the Society might take about problems of unemployment among minority and politically radical social scientists.

I am much less optimistic about the progress the Society has made in focusing on the employment of blacks and other racial and ethnic minority groups in our profession. Certainly in recent years, there has been no appreciable increase in participation of minority members in SSSP, and most certainly no significant change in their participation in leadership positions. The only offices held by blacks in recent years have been appointive and the few blacks nominated to elective positions have been defeated by much better known, white opponents. The only Special Problems Division that has elected black chairpersons has been Intergroup Relations (and that itself might well be taken as tokenism). It should be of considerable concern that SSSP has been ignored by the Black Caucus, an effective force in sensitizing the ASA to the need for more adequate black representation in leadership roles. The participation in SSSP of other racial or ethnic groups, such as American Indians or Spanish-speaking minorities, is virtually nonexistent.

Until the Society has actively drawn minorities into leadership roles, little will be done to address ourselves to problems related to their tenuous status in academia. The impetus must come from those who are most concerned. The Society, however, must provide a channel for expressing that concern through real affirmative efforts to draw minority members into leadership roles both in the Society as a whole and within the various divisions.

The exploitation of graduate students is a distressing problem and, as the Lees note, one SSSP has not addressed. Certainly, most graduate students, faced with the economic necessities of survival in academia, have too often been forced to sell themselves into a voluntary servitude. Our colleagues (perish the thought that any of us would engage in such practices) are too prone to regard their teaching and research assistants paternalistically as apprentices

in a medieval-guild system. One area we, as members of a professional society, might specifically consider is the exploitation of student contributions to research and/or writing reported at our meetings or published in our journal. I suspect that frequently a major contribution is made by the student, who only receives second authorship or is even relegated to a footnote in the final product.

We must also be sensitive to the economic crisis in higher education jeopardizing the very existence of graduate student funding. It seems unlikely that proposals increasing the level of graduate student support will be accepted at this time. What is our responsibility to students when their institutional support is insufficient?

The Lees' point about the need to democratize our nominations system further by allowing for nomination by petition is well taken and has already been incorporated into the revision of our constitution now being drafted. Their criticism of late-spring elections also is completely justified and this office is making every effort to follow election schedules more closely. We are using first-class mailings of election materials to prevent delays from recurring. On the other hand, I doubt the necessity of involving an outside agency in counting election ballots. The election ballot counting is done at no cost to the Society by a committee of our colleagues newly appointed each year. While there has been criticism of the process of mailing ballots (some of it well justified), I know of not even the slightest suggestion of mismanagement (and certainly not of manipulation) of the ballot counting process. Without further evidence of need, I see no justification to incur this additional expense. . . .

I take greatest exception to the Lees' final point. In a somewhat cavalier, and I am sure unintentional, fashion (I was tempted to say paternalistic but perhaps our founding parents are justified in being a bit paternalistic or maternalistic), they have put down what I consider the most dynamic force for change within the Society for the Study of Social Problems—the Special Problems Divisions. Perhaps some of the divisions may have “cozy meetings and serve careerists goals mutually helpful to their members.” (I am not even sure that these are negative characteristics as long as the meetings are open to all and democratically run. There is considerable positive value in the real interaction that can occur only in cozy meetings and, in these days, our younger, less well-established members need all the help they can get in furthering their careers.) However, during the past few years the divisions have been a good deal more. They have been one of the important forces within the Society for bringing women and younger, more radically-oriented members into roles of leadership and responsibility. Through their newsletters, several divisions have opened up new channels of communication and exchange of ideas. (One even started a new journal.) Despite the concern of some of the more traditionally oriented among us (including this writer) that it might “water down” the quality of our meetings, the divisions considerably expanded participation in our annual programs through the use of round-table discussions, working seminars, and panel discussions. But more important, the latter has done just what the Lees criticize us for not doing: encouraged the challenging discussion of crucial social issues. The division chairpeople, through their representative on the Board of Directors and through meetings with the Board, have been a direct voice of the grass roots membership of the Society and have sensitized the Board to the need for change in our structure and processes.

It may be that the changes have been slower in coming than some of us would have wanted but, from my perspective, I see much progress, most of it in the direction of making this Society more open, responsive, and relevant. The initial source of this change was, in fact, a self-conscious mandate for reinvigoration of the sort the Lees now want. It began with the deliberations of the Committee on the Future of SSSP in 1968-69. The seeds of change

planted in the recommendation of that committee are now bearing fruit. Perhaps, as the Lees suggest, the Society should build this process into our structure, but I would caution against making it an ongoing process. For many years a standing New Projects Committee existed to serve that function, but it atrophied from disuse. Last year, we looked back on where we have been. Maybe in the next couple of years, we again should examine where we are going. Many of the recommendations of the 1968-69 reports of the Committee on the Future of the SSSP still have not been implemented. Some of the more worthwhile ones might be resurrected. Maybe a reevaluation each decade might be necessary to revitalize the Society, to keep it vigorous, and to keep it responsive to the needs of our membership, to the needs of our profession, and to the needs of the larger society of which we are a part and whose problems we study.

MABEL ELLIOTT (8/23/75)

(SSSP President 1956-57)

As I think Al and Betty's paper indicated, they were regarded as a rebel group. Many of us (in the early SSSP) weren't really rebels but were interested in a voice for able people (who weren't being heard) in the American Sociological Society . . . I don't think there was any great personal reason for Al Lee feeling that way, and certainly there wasn't for me. We both had been active in the ASS., and I had been chairman of committees and program committees Anyhow, I had no complaint about lack of recognition, and I'm sure that was true of many of the (early SSSP) members. But we did feel there was a greater reason for democracy. There was such a tendency to keep the control in a certain group in the ASS., and many others, including Howard Becker, not the present Howard S. Becker but the earlier Howard Becker of the University of Wisconsin, were very much leaders in preventing everything from being dominated by the University of Chicago as it was at an early time. Many young people felt they never got a fair hearing in the Society

I was on the SSSP board for several years before I was nominated for president. I had a notion by then that we were almost duplicating, in some ways, the thing we were charging the ASS. with, of being an ingrown group, because I had served for many years on the board. But we were beginning to make a little impress on the Sociological Society (It was called "society" not "association" then).

I think that today the SSSP doesn't have to pipe for any recognition; that it is a recognized segment of sociologists, many of whom are recognized as distinguished and able . . . It has also provided a forum for the young Turks and other people who are interested in various angles of sociological fields and developments. It has provided us a pattern of democratic elections, which is good and a recognition that there should be opportunities for new faces and new ideas in the field I know when I was a visiting professor at the University of Georgia, I was impressed by the quality of the faculty at that institution. But they weren't well known in the field. I went to the Southern Sociological Society and was impressed with the calibre of the papers, very impressed, including some from Sociologists at what were colored institutions at that time. I could see why they (in the SSS) resented the fact they weren't being recognized as a national society because of this sort of ingrown method of appointing committees or making nominations so that they were almost exclusively northern sociologists. This could apply to other sections as well, I think . . . So we need to, in our national Societies, provide that stimulus for the whole, it seems to me.

BYRON FOX (8/24/75)

(SSSP President 1957-58)

(Interviewer): In your judgment, what should this organization keep on doing, stop doing, and start doing?

(Fox): I think some of the things we should keep on doing are the things we've referred to (earlier), and Al's referred to, as bold, imaginative directions of action. (This should include) more than just talking about social problems and their analysis; it should include involving ourselves in the body politic. Some of the things we should quit doing are the things that don't lead in that direction. I think we should be far bolder than we have ever been, than we are now. We're not distinguishable from the American body politic as sociologists, as SSSP members. If our members are dispersed in the community, they're not thought of as flaming radicals. I think we're bound by our heritage of sociology and by our old conceptions of staying away from normative judgements and that sort of thing. What we need, and I had hoped from the first that we'd have this, would be a SSSP commitment to social change and to radical movements of whatever kind. Make sure they're solidly based on fact but not stopping short of action. That's the direction I'd like to see us go.

RICHARD SCHERMERHORN (8/23/75)

(SSSP President 1958-59)

I greet this occasion tonight (25th anniversary session of SSSP) with pleasure—but not unmixed pleasure. In my earlier days, I now recall similar events which my cronies and myself sadistically welcomed so we could dismiss quite publicly a number of prominent mossbacks who would no longer bring our profession into disrepute. With the reversal of roles that is my fate tonight, I now understand why the mossbacks had just the opposite idea: emeritus we are told, is the stage of life when you think you know all the answers, but no one asks the questions.

It is reassuring to see Al Lee and Lew Coser here tonight. Their real fame among sociologists lies not only in their writings and activities of great renown but also in the nimble feat of having served as the president of both SSSP and ASA. Those of us who recall the salad days will remember that we would have regarded such an exploit as inherently contradictory in the Marxian sense, such was our aversion to the sociological old guard elite whose exclusivist policies we were fighting tooth and nail

ALVIN W. GOULDNER (7/14/76)

(SSSP President 1960-61)

The SSSP has been in a state of ferment and turmoil since its inception, but this has certainly not been due simply to the intellectual state of the discipline. It is also due in part to the internal condition of its own social system and due in larger part to the condition of the great world.

The main thing the SSSP still has going for it is a sense of community which many members will not risk injuring. One can sympathize, yet intellectual stimulation or growth is inevitably impaired when personal ties come first. For that reason, I fear that there is nothing that can come from the 'wisdom of the elder statesman' of the SSSP.

The SSSP also seems to be becoming increasingly remote from the great changes now making their way through the world. There is a whole revolution going on in Europe; there is the rise of Mediterranean Communism; there is the breakdown of Soviet hegemony over other Communist parties; there is the continuing revolution in China; there is also the endemic energy crisis. And look what we get: papers on "Watch Queens" and homosexuals diddling one another in public toilets! When we gave the C. Wright Mills award for that trivia, one had to begin to suspect that it was all over for the Society. And it probably is, unless some hard-hitting, hard-working and very smart group of unpleasant youngsters decide to take over the Society. Doubtless, I will see you all at the next wake.

MARSHALL CLINARD (11/75)

(SSSP President 1961-62)

(Clinard): SSSP has been a unique organization because a large number of the people participating in it feel that they are part of it, part of the councils in which they all play an active role. I suppose that the number of people in the whole organization involved in one thing or another is very great. I think that over a period of time the number of people that have been involved in one role or another as members of councils, or of something, is quite great as compared to ASA. Because of this, what issues are engaged in and what people do, and how the programs at the national meetings are put together, is pretty much . . . self-help or democratic. This is as compared to the feeling I think a lot of people have about the ASA, as though the thing is so big and so run out of Washington and the executive offices that it's handed to you on a silver platter; the average member is not too much involved in it . . . People who get involved in the ASA are usually a small quota, even to this day, and they more or less make the decisions for the rest of the members . . . What I'm trying to say is that the SSSP brings in new blood; the ASA, as a whole, doesn't. The ASA has too many old fossils. Those who hold ASA offices and committee memberships continue to be the same small number of persons.

(Interviewer): There is one final thing I'd like to ask you: Is there anything you feel the SSSP should keep doing, should stop doing, or maybe should start doing in its organization?

(Clinard): Oh, that's a broad statement . . . I personally would like to see an SSSP type of organization that could testify before Congress, congressional committees, and state committees on important issues. As in the past, it could be issues connected with the traditional ones of crime, mental disorder, alcoholism and so on. I do think that some kind of formulated policy could be worked out. I realize that the group has various interests but it would be of value if, for example, some committees could be appointed to draw up specific legislative proposals in some depth and then to testify before a national or state congressional committee on them.

MARVIN SUSSMAN (8/23/75)

(SSSP President 1962-63)

I was secretary-treasurer for SSSP, then vice-president, and prior to the presidency, I was chair of the community committee. We had committees in those days rather than councils and attempted some innovative practices, such as publishing books, undertaking collaborative

research, and raising money for research conferences and publications. My feeling was, and I still have it today, that SSSP should not be a miniature ASA It should provide an opportunity for intellectual development, a scholarly exchange on a very intensive basis around special concerns related to social problems as we have defined these in structuring various divisions. This Society should provide opportunity to have a forum for people who have special interests.

But a continuous source of disappointment has been that much of the annual program has gone back to a very traditional pattern. Papers presented now are often unrelated and difficult to put together and attendance at such seminars is often an embarrassment to participants. An example of non-traditional programs are the few small group seminars at a recent (1975) meeting. One hopes to develop a non-sexist measure of social class to use in looking at social problems. It met a total of six hours and may have generated a very basic intellectual development among the people who participated to continue work on this particular critical issue.

During my tenure of active participation, there was developed a network of intimate intellectual groups with continuity, a relationship with peers much like an extended family based on common intellectual and social interests, groups which continued activity throughout the year. The idea was to use basically a seminar format and to develop linkages among individuals so that they continued intellectual communications and scholarly activities year round.

If SSSP is going to be a meaningful Society, it ought to provide the kind of experience you can't get elsewhere, and that you would be motivated to come to, not because it precedes ASA, but because in and of itself it is vital and important, it is given the highest priority My contention has been that these committees, these autonomous groups, are basically the strength of the Society, more than the elected officials. They ought to be optimally financially supported and particularly encouraged to do non-traditional intellectual activities in social problems conceptualization, research, and policy formation One-time innovative practices in time become institutionalized, and you have to "shake the basket." A shake up or shake down is now overdue, and I hope the new leadership will do the traditionectomy.

IRWIN DEUTSCHER (8/23/75)

(SSSP President 1964-65)

As for the future of the Society . . . I think there is a constant need to be on the alert. I like the repetitive reminders to ourselves about, "let's not be like the ASA." They get to be ritualistic; they get to sound trite; but I think they're important. I think it's important that the Society remember that it's there for the people who are not in the mainstream When they are otherwise blocked, it provides platforms for people.

It does provide a career mechanism to some. I know at least one president of this Society who deliberately used it that way, and he didn't even bother to come to our ceremonial occasion (25th anniversary plenary session and banquet) the other night. He had no interest in the Society. He got himself elected because he was a well-known sociologist who did good work and he needed the launching thing. But I think it worked that way for all of us, both big and small.

When I was elected president, Arnold Rose came back from Europe, and he made a point to stay over with us in Syracuse. We stayed up all night, and when he tried to explain to me the dangers of the "eastern establishment," I wasn't buying it. I lived in the east, and thought, "Well, maybe the sociology of some of these guys isn't what I dig, but . . . it's no great con-

spiracy.” I couldn’t see it; none of it made any sense. He hammered at me all night, and it still didn’t make any sense. Years later, it began to make sense. I understand now what he was talking about

(He said) they ran a closed shop, carefully sponsoring certain people through certain mechanisms, not only through offices and committees in the ASA but through the Russell Sage Foundation and the Social Science Research Council. It was a very tight thing. Once in a while they’d let in an outlander and watch him carefully, and if he came around, okay. I know some sociologists who . . . weren’t particularly outstanding but who achieved favor as a result of this kind of sponsorship. Here, I could name four or five individuals, nice guys, reasonably adequate sociologists, but nothing remarkable. It was the sponsorship system. That was the kind of thing (one kind of thing) Arnold was talking about

The establishment which we’re talking about was also a group that worked very closely with and which loved to be invited to do anything to help bigshots. They were much more concerned about the respectability of the discipline in the eyes of outsiders and in its appearance of scientific integrity, than they were about the quality of the work that sociologists did

I don’t harbor any resentment against the establishment. They haven’t done me any damage. I’ve gotten to do what I wanted to do when and where I wanted to do it. I’ve gotten my share of grants when I wanted them and fellowships when I wanted them, and apparently there was no great conspiracy to keep me from doing those things. It was more of a positive (than negative) conspiracy in that it helped people who didn’t know much or warrant the help. They kept things in the family. I don’t think it necessarily hurt people who didn’t need whatever it was that was available, the resources.

I think the biggest danger for the society is that of becoming crystallized and making ritualistic statements about young people and “out” people which may not become real. I’ve realized that there are too many older people still very intimately involved in this Society, and they shouldn’t be. Sort of an old guard. It’s a kind of paternalism . . . I think that organizations ought to go whatever way the young, fresh members want them to go.

HOWARD S. BECKER (5/21/76)

(SSSP President 1965-66)

SSSP should continue to exist as a countervailing force to the ASA. The more fragmented the associational world of sociology, the better. I think it is best when we have the least power centralized anywhere. I’d hate to live to see the time when any organization could speak for all of sociology. And SSSP is important because it prevents the ASA from doing just that.

MELVIN TUMIN (12/11/75)

(SSSP President 1966-67)

I can’t accurately recollect the grounds and conditions of my initial involvement with SSSP. I believe I was attracted initially by its orientation to social problems. But I am not even sure of that. I cannot recall what were the main issues that SSSP was involved in at that time, except for the perennial issue of sociology as science vs. sociology as social activism. I think I remember being concerned with what I considered to be the wrong view of matters, namely, the idea that the association and the journal should become actively politically in-

volved in societal problems. I believe I did not think that was correct then, and I certainly do not believe that is correct now.

Regarding my role as president and the period just before I took office, I do not think I had a particular mission in mind. I did not see myself as coming in to rescue the Society from the doldrums. I think I was rather pleased personally to have been thought well enough of by my colleagues to be nominated and elected. I thought it was important to try to make the Society and the journal better thought of by sociologists than it was, and I believe that I felt it was important to try to do this by trying to make it a fine sociology journal, albeit with a specialized focus. I cannot really say whether I accomplished much in these regards at all.

As for the future of SSSP, I think it is probably as active in its various affairs as most of its members want it to be. It has alternated between more and less egregious emphases on muckraking and false consciousness-raising. I wish the Society and the journal would try much harder than most of its members seem to want to become a fine sociology journal. Certainly, plenty of room exists in our very large discipline for a really fine journal. I would see that as the main *raison d'être* for the existence of the Society. Otherwise, it would seem to me that the American Sociological Association serves about 99 percent of the functions I care about. I would hope we do not try to be influential in the world. I would hope, rather, that we would try to be very smart, very inventive, and very intellectual.

LEWIS COSER (8/24/75)

(SSSP President 1967-68)

I was teaching at Brandeis University, and one of my colleagues was Jerry Himelhoch, who was of that initial group around Al Lee. He signed me up for SSSP; then I served on a variety of committees for a while. Later there came a period when I was rather inactive, I was one of those who felt that there was no direction any more, no sense of what the Society was going to accomplish that would be different from the others. Then when I got elected, I almost immediately got together a group of people to think about invigorating the society, giving somewhat more purpose and so on. We had a committee that met once or twice. Kai Erikson was on it, also Stan Wheeler and Peter Rose, and that committee finally worked out a proposal for "basic change." The amusing thing is that nothing really happened. We presented it to the membership the next year.

Everyone agreed with one exception. Al Gouldner gave a passionate speech against it saying that we were selling out to the welfare state or something like that. But that fell flat. It led to a very passionate interchange between Gouldner and myself; some people still remember it apparently. Well, my point was that radical sociology should be represented within the SSSP, but that there was no point of imposing this particular line on the SSSP. As I say, practically the whole membership meeting endorsed the report of this committee and we thought, "Well, now we're going to go in that direction."

The idea was, for example, in *Social Problems*, to have more special issues around specific themes, ones more tied to the actualities of politics and what was happening now, rather than simply papers that come in and, if judged acceptable, are printed. Generally, the idea was somehow to tie *Social Problems* more to social-policy issues, however, not exclusively. That report is still around, that must have been '67 - '68. Well, the sad fact is that everybody agreed, everybody thought it was great and beautiful, and nothing ever came of it.

(Interviewer): How would you explain that?

(Coser): The organization by that time was some 15 years old. People had their ingrained habits. One thing that we were unhappy about was with what we thought at the time was the rigidity of the special study sections, or whatever they're called: the alcoholics, the mental health people, and so on. We wanted to restrict them somewhat. We felt that at the meetings, also, there ought to be more common themes and less attention to this and that particular thing. The mere conservatism of the organization, not political conservatism but just the way the darn thing operated, led to the fact that already at the next meeting we were back in the old grooves and that those points were strictly forgotten. But it might be sort of interesting to resurrect the report because now again there seems to be a tendency precisely in that direction.

If people are, let's say, in psychiatric research, they have a kind of a vested interest in seeing that their group is given enough space and enough general attention at the meetings, and they want to see the psychiatric-sociological people together. So they've built up these kinds of vested interests that will continue each year. Here at this particular (1975) meeting, I think it goes very well because there are all these specialized interest groups, but in addition this time, there can be enough room, enough time . . . I think we meet one day more. So, everybody seems to be accommodated. But in other years, when we had relatively less affluent arrangements, that became a problem. In other words, what we wanted was a little less *laissez faire* and a little more overall direction of the meetings, the newsletter, and *Social Problems*. But, as I say, it really didn't work.

The group that I relied on, and I am of course older than they, were the people that were then looked toward as sort of the coming people. Most of those in that group, in the meantime, have been presidents also. But I think by the time they were in the presidency, they also realized that it doesn't pay to fight city hall.

I've always been quite active in ASA's affairs, and I saw SSSP as doing a very important but necessarily restricted job. I didn't see the SSSP as capable of carrying the torch all by itself. So I've always been for relatively close relationships with the ASA, certainly for having the meetings at the same time. Now what has happened, of course, is that in some ways we have been more successful than we ever expected in taking over much of the ASA, changing its character. I thought Al Lee's remarks were rather ungracious in this respect. He sort of suggested that people used SSSP as a springboard for mobility in ASA, which is utter nonsense, I think. Most of us were active in the ASA long before we ever became active in the SSSP.

But in any case I still see the SSSP as a kind of a ginger group that prods the ASA along. Now, in some years, there may be very little need of that, I suppose. During my year of the presidency of ASA, there wasn't much need for nonconformist ideas to be brought in from outside the ASA, and the next year, of course, will be similar. But there may again come a period when the ASA is going to go back a little bit on its commitment to social problems and current issues, and then outside prodding may be very good. There will be a new group of people, a new generation of people prodding oldsters. So I see ourselves still as a kind of ginger group. . . .

There's always a related problem for every (such) association. I was once president of the Eastern Sociological Society . . . Some people said, "Why don't we talk about Vietnam for the entire meeting? Give the whole meeting to Vietnam." I happened to be very involved in the Vietnam issue, but I argued very passionately against this proposal. I said, "Well, what the hell? We have members who are mathematical sociologists. You can't tell a guy not to present anything unless it deals with current issues." So one had to find some kind of middle way. . . .

ALBERT REISS (10/6/75)

(SSSP President 1968-69)

(In the early days of the SSSP, many) were opting for certain kinds of strategies of change without adequate theory and limited knowledge about how you get a society to change.

We still don't have adequate knowledge. Quite recently, Ed Lemert noted in his presidential address to SSSP that "a sense of embattlement is inescapable" in the sociology of deviance and social control. He then proceeds to draw attention to the vitality of a group interaction and organization perspective in understanding societal reaction and social control. His observations draw attention to the continuing dialogue in the field. In this early period of the SSSP, much of the work on social problems emphasized intervention in the lives of individuals as the major focal point of social change. People were more interested in changing individual behavior than in changing behavior by altering institutional and organizational arrangements at the macroscopic level of societies. SSSP members were more committed to macroscopic change while SPSSI members were more committed to the individual levels of change.

(Interviewer): Now, going to the period just before you assumed the presidency of the SSSP, what were the major objectives that you hoped to accomplish as president of the SSSP?

(Reiss): Well, at that time the society was beginning to ask what has become a perennial question: "has SSSP lost fervor as a social movement within sociology?" Some significant changes were then underway in the American Sociological Association. More social problems and applied sociology sessions were being offered at the annual meetings and joint sessions were becoming commonplace. Some members of SSSP were asking: "Should we simply become a section of the American Sociological Association?"

A second kind of question related the society's agenda to that of the larger society. Within both SSSP and ASA there was more self-conscious concern with the relevance of sociology to social policy. There always had been a core interested in applied sociology—people like Paul Lazarsfeld emphasized the uses of sociology or how to make sociology useful. The problems of the 60's increasingly led more of the membership to major questions of social policy and social action. There were both intellectual and action agendas. These forces tended to press SSSP as to what was its future role—whether it was to continue an independent role or whether it had reached a point where it might gracefully fold back into ASA. Or, if not gracefully, at least be folded back.

In any case, my own interest was in what contribution members of SSSP could make to the issues of that period. How could we relate our interest in social problems to issues of social policy and social action? It seemed to me the period of the 60's was one in which at least sociologists at large, as well as those in SSSP, became much more interested in policy issues. So I thought the society should move into those issues.

To return to an earlier theme, I think there are good reasons for keeping SSSP going as an independent organization. I think that our membership tends to raise kinds of issues and questions from time to time that are very important in the mainstream of sociology; I certainly would not vote for folding it into the ASA. The question is how can we make it a more vital kind of organization? One way is by focusing on certain values and "end states," such as the reduction of social inequality, and how social change can facilitate reaching those ends. Even if we don't make a concerted effort to do that, the very fact that the SSSP brings together specialists from various problem areas and focuses on common issues and problems is very useful for the larger discipline. If anything I think there is some danger that we not keep a particular kind of social problem, social action, social policy identity—that we fall into a "basic research" paradigm. However, I don't like to foster the

distinction that ASA is for basic research and SSSP for applied research. SSSP members do both.

It is generally felt that change in the structure of meetings will revitalize the SSSP, that if the proper topics are selected for discussion and the right people brought together, exciting things will occur. Sections are thought to be a dominant element in SSSP, but that has never really been the case. There is little continuity in the program of most sections from year to year. Occasionally members of a section have a sense of direction and vitality but the effort is not sustained.

(Interviewer): Has any consideration been given to having local meetings prior to national meetings?

(Reiss): The question of the SSSP's relationship to regional associations has been raised. Regional meetings tend to be social problems oriented in any case. More nonacademic people, such as social workers, tend to be involved in regional meetings. There perhaps is less need, therefore, to stimulate regional consideration of social problems, policy, and action; if anything, the regional associations already are very vital in this area.

RAYMOND MACK (10/75)

(SSSP President 1969-70)

(Interviewer): Would you explain your initial involvement with SSSP?

(Mack): I read about what they were doing, and it was in line with my own interests in the uses of social science. I didn't find the distinction between basic and applied social science to be sensible, and this looked like the right outfit for me. In a discipline where we talk about basic theoretical contributions—Weber on bureaucratic controls, *Management and the Worker*, *The American Soldier*—all of our basic, theoretical concepts come from applied work. My interest in stratification and ethnicity made me think SSSP was the place where I would find people to talk with and learn from.

I started out with the special section then called race relations. I wound up being chairman, and then I was elected to the executive committee. Ultimately I was elected president.

I thought it was very important that we remain a scholarly organization (though that is not in conflict with my answer to the first question). I thought there was a lot of pressure in the late 1960s for us to be politicized in what I considered a bad way. "Correct attitude" tests of who ought to be an SSSP person (was something I disagreed with). It was important that people should stand and speak on the point that our goal was to deal with the roots and consequences of social problems. I remember Lew Coser making an impassioned speech at a business meeting with an accent that lent weight to his remarks: "I have seen social science politicized, and I plead with you not to do that with this society." (What were the issues?) I don't remember examples but the general tone; one issue was whether SSSP should meet in a corporation-owned hotel. I felt that was the wrong way to be investing our energy. We shouldn't look silly as scholars; we should do research that enables us to demonstrate to the citizenry what the basic issues are, not to boycott a hotel. I thought we were spending too much time on that sort of thing rather than on scholarship.

The development of friendships based on scholarly respect and respect for colleagues got me further involved in the organization. The first was getting to know Jessie Bernard, a founding mother, when I was working on conflicts and trying to translate what I knew from industrial sociology to the race area where I felt that conflict and competition were the best translating keys.

(Interviewer): Do you see pressures and problems that SSSP does not address?

I have no sympathy with the argument that we shouldn't recognize the contribution of people who don't have a degree or work in a job called sociologist. That knocks out people like Roethlisberger and Dickson and a host of others. I would hope that most of us have the training to enable us to improve on the work of journalists, most of the time. But we should pay attention when we have something to learn. We should remember that Robert Park was a journalist.

On the question of standards, that you are going to improve the quality of sociology by lowering them is nonsense. When elitism means lack of access to opportunity, we should oppose it. But when elitism means that we are disciplined and discriminate in favor of the very best work, that is reasonable.

KAI ERIKSON (10/6/75)

(SSSP President 1970-71)

I came into sociology through the old Chicago back door. I like to think of myself as part of the same spiritual generation as Howard Becker and Erving Goffman and people like that. I overlapped with them in Chicago, and most of them belonged to SSSP. There was a feeling then that SSSP was smaller than the ASA, more intimate in size, and that it generated greater interest in contemporary affairs, but not in a specific way. The people I knew in SSSP then were less professional in the very formal sense. They were less committed to survey research and less committed to the large institute approach. . . .

I got involved very early in elective offices. So I just sort of drifted from committee to committee, from position to position.

When I first went into SSSP, my professional interests were criminology and deviance; so I naturally went to those kinds of sessions more often. But it's in the nature of SSSP that one can just wander across the surface of the organization and not feel obliged to make one's way along any particular channel. I never felt that I had a particular niche in SSSP, a corner in which I belonged.

The organization is held together by pieces of scotch tape and baling wire, and it matters how you handle the little, everyday crises. The big problem my (presidential) year was a movement among some of the membership to see whether or not we should move out of convention hotels and into "the community," nobody being all that specific about what that meant. I liked the idea as a general principle, but I had no idea how to administer it as a practical fact. So we played that one back and forth and ended up at the University of Denver Law School. It was a good meeting but we were just very lucky, mainly because we had a superb Program Committee chaired by Larry Ross.

SSSP still feels like a community, and maybe that is why it handles diversity so much better than ASA. We're softer, more resilient. The revolutionary impulse of the late 60s came to SSSP like a rush of wind and filled the corridors with commotion, but the society just cleared some space and took it all in stride. ASA got all geared up and had a thousand formal meetings about it. I hope this doesn't sound silly, but SSSP has more humor, more irreverence; a lot of heated controversy can be accommodated there without everyone feeling that the fate of western civilization is on the line. We don't retreat into rules as much. We don't formalize procedures as much. During the worst of the turmoil (and I was president during part of that time) no one seemed to feel we were under siege. The fact that SSSP membership is younger and farther to the left may have had something to do with it. But not much. . . .

I'm not sure how helpful it is to have strong visions about the future shape of the Society. SSSP ought to be flexible enough to accomodate the needs of the membership as they evolve. So to have too strict a constitution or too strong an official sense of purpose or too weighty a history always works to its disadvantage, it seems to me. I think SSSP ought to be regarded as starting all over again every year. One of the things that bothered me about the meetings in San Francisco was the feeling expressed by several people that we should be bound by the vision held by a few founders back in 1952. I honor that vision, but we should make it as easy as possible for new ones to emerge. I guess I feel that it is more important for the society to retain its character and its heart than to have a program.

ALBERT COHEN (8/24/75)

(SSSP President 1971-72)

Back in the middle 60s a number of us (who knew one another well) decided we were an elite and that this was not the way the Society was meant to be operated. A great many people who deserved the recognition and who also had the knowledge and skills did not get nominated and elected. So we proposed the seeming paradox of making it more democratic by having a nominating committee, just like the ASA.

This was an interesting experiment in organizational governance and with it came the notion that intrinsically democratic procedures do not really contribute to the objectives for which they are intended . . . One major concern at that time (and one recurrent in the organization) was the relationship between the executive committee (now the board of directors), and what ever principles it represents, and the sections (now the divisions of problems special). The board of directors and the officers are elected by the entire membership, so in a sense they derive their authority, legitimacy, from that fact. It is the board . . . which speaks for the society, and it alone can legislate, and handle the budgets. So it represents the principle of centralization, and, in terms of hierarchy, it is the top level. But the special problems divisions, from the beginning, have been a distinctive feature, have had a great appeal to younger members, and have been the center of informality and of what might be called local control and self-directed activity toward scholarly or professional aims and activities. They . . . are a mechanism whereby members could share common interests and meet in really small groups . . . typically in seminar or colloquia settings where people could speak freely with a minimum of embarrassment or constraint . . .

This was distinctive in contrast to ASA, and it was very productive. This informality was very congenial to the spirit of SSSP. It prevailed also in the executive committee which operated in about the same sloppy way.

There is some tension in the two principles: local autonomy versus effective participation in society-wide affairs; walk-in-off-the-street versus election to high office. Many people, even on the executive committee, thought the sections (now the divisions) were the most valuable feature. But consider, many of the people on the executive committee had never been in the divisions or sections. It was like two organizations. Experience in the sections had little to do with elections; election was based on your reputation in the profession. People who had never been in a section were elected, and people who were active in the sections were never elected. There was no interaction. People on the executive committee were very busy people because, for example, they were distinguished scholars. They were also presenting papers at ASA, had organizational responsibilities at ASA, or had little time to participate in the life of a section. So the two aspects of the organization went their own way.

I was much concerned with further integration of the two. We decided, by action of board and consultation with the chairpersons of the sections, that when the chairperson functioned as the nominating committee, one member of the board would sit with them. We didn't say who. I think I was the first person to do so when I was vice-president. To do this well, one must have a sense of the problem and the topics from the higher-level viewpoint. This change was designed to give a notion of some of the considerations that are taken into account when nominating persons to various offices.

We asked, during this same time, that the chairperson of the committee of chairpersons sit on the board, so that during the board's deliberations, there would always be somebody who could speak with knowledge and authority from the perspective of the actions. This is an interesting side of the original history of the organization. Some people have complained of the lack of symmetry of our organization. It didn't conform to the tables of organization of the manuals. It was anomalous. Occasionally, proposals would come that this was irrational, and it should be restructured in a more rational and symmetrical way. I've always been involved in the rewriting of the constitution so I've had much opportunity to think about these things, and I have come to recognize there are these two principles. They pull in two different directions: the board being more to coordinate; the sections to pull in different directions, each one doing its own thing. I think over the years every organization has some sources of tension, but I don't recognize this as a problem at all. I think it is something creative. But we do need mechanisms to mediate between them and to make them fruitful, such as in SSSP, the chairperson of chairpersons, the most cosmopolitan of the locals, being a link with members of the board.

EDWIN LEMERT (2/3/76)

(SSSP President 1972-73)

. . . . Recollection of my experience as President of SSSP is still somewhat painful; something I would prefer to forget rather than to recall.

As I remember, one of the problems at the time was to increase dues, which led to controversy over a graduated system, (a proposal) which was ultimately (and unwisely, in my estimation) adopted.

As President, after considerable preparation with the assistance of Michael Howe and John Conrad. I proposed creation of a committee to undertake policy research and reports on current issues, a little in the Ralph Nader style. This was savagely attacked in the business meeting by chairpersons of the special problems sections and A. McClung Lee. In the same session, the Executive Committee also was subjected to very rough criticism from the floor. It was a great year for anti establishment rhetoric but not so pleasant for those of us on the receiving end. I think that my error was to misjudge the effect of my proposal on section chairpersons and the extent to which even the SSSP was still part of A. McClung Lee's personality cult!

The champagne party was pleasant that year.

ROSE COSER (Spring, 1976,)

(SSSP President 1973-74)

When I became a member of SSSP, I was pleased with the idea of being involved in an organization that was policy and action oriented. I had hoped that, due to its sociological

orientation, it could become more effective than SPSSI. Though I still continue to feel committed to the organization, I am somewhat disappointed that it has not been able to become more effective. What I would like to see would be some committees on public policy, or a committee on health that would be preoccupied with proposing changes in health care, or committees in other fields, such as education.

It seems to me that it is still possible for the SSSP to reorient itself toward social action. But to do this, the divisions themselves must want such reorientation and work toward it. Right now, there is too much paper reading for paper reading sake, which is, of course, important for the authors in their own careers (and I think this is valuable indeed); but I feel the efforts of the divisions ought to be directed with more focus on influencing policy. It is only with such an orientation that the SSSP can have a claim on being a social movement.

There has always been a good spirit in the SSSP which I would like to see maintained, a spirit of people who share the willingness to do useful things for their society and who maintain, and encourage each other to maintain, a critical stance. I hope this spirit will continue and even develop further. Without this, it would be less fun to be a sociologist.

STANTON WHEELER (10/76)

(SSSP President 1974-75)

My impression, with regard to the SSSP, is that it has thought of itself as doing two things: one is being less conservative than the ASA (more concerned with value choices and more directly concerned with a more activist kind of social policy), and the second simply is being a smaller, more informal aggregation of people whom one might be interested in sharing some time with at meetings. One of the things I appreciated (right from my initial involvement) was the participation, which is related to its smaller size and to the fact that you can see people you'd like to see, its relative informality. Although this is undoubtedly very much in the eye of the beholder, my impression is that the purpose of the SSSP was more and more in doubt as the years wore on. Some sections of the ASA were doing things that the SSSP might in the past have seen as its specialty, and, given all the other sources taking value positions in the society, SSSP lost its special mission in that connection. At least I didn't feel any great sense of zeal within SSSP over the last three or four years. One of the things I know I was concerned with as president was making sure that we had a really good meeting, and we had, very largely due to a superb program director, Jacqueline Wiseman. We had excellent attendance, very good sessions, and nothing but positive comments from a whole range of people about it. But I guess I say that only because it seemed to me that it was the socially integrated function of the organization that was being lost, along with all the other. But at least that was, I hope, rebuilt a little bit this time, although I'm still in doubt as to the broader sort of socio-political justification for it as a separate organization.

I guess one could really have a searching series of sessions or meetings, if it ever would pay off to ask a question that way, and ask precisely what we should be doing in a collective way. I do not have any strongly defined, urgently felt needs for a basic change in direction right now. Obviously, it doesn't make sense to have two organizations in the same area trying to do the same thing. We should look for new opportunities and ones that aren't being taken up by the ASA.

(Interviewer): Can such a Society encourage a certain kind of intellectual direction do you think? Can it actively do it rather than simply accept it if it comes their way?

(Wheeler): Yes, but without organization, without, e.g., a larger administrative office, it's a little hard to be enormously pro-active as distinct to re-active with regard to what its membership wants and feels. I think that if successive presidents and program chairpersons devote themselves to emphasizing structural problems in the society, not just those that we assess primarily with regard to the poor, I think that could have some effect over time, but it would be a modest effect.

I guess I worry a little bit, as I would worry about any executive function of a Society, about becoming too pro-active. That is, the organization should represent the wishes of its members if it's a democratic organization. The more one thinks of its becoming pro-active the more that tends to suggest that some elite group of people at its apex are going to begin dictating policy, which is exactly what the Society fled from a quarter of a century ago. So I guess I would be a little bit leery of a kind of pro-active pushing in particular directions. Doing that is fine if it represents the genuine thrust of the membership as a whole. If it does that and if we have a staff that could help encourage it, fine. Still, I doubt if our moral voice itself is going to be terribly potent in a society structured like our own. It may be that there's a broader way through which social science can contribute to a humanistic culture. I think that persons would make different, more informed value choices if they've absorbed more of the core of sociology. So, in that sense, too, there may be payoff. I guess I am skeptical of the assumption that animated many persons for a long time, that there is a sort of obvious, almost automatic, immediate and direct way anything one learns as a sociologist can be converted into a policy that ought to govern people. I think if we've learned anything we've probably learned that that is unlikely to be the case, because life is enormously complex and involves series of issues that depend more on moral judgment and on philosophical judgment than on some specific problems of evidence.

BERNARD BECK (12/12/75)

(SSSP President 1976-77)

The character of the organization exists quite apart from what it calls itself and its mission. It is unique because of its small size, because it is content oriented, and because it is instinctively democratic. The people you find there are the most interesting, the most humane, and the most provocative people in the field.

(Interviewer): What do you wish to accomplish in your Presidency?

(Beck): I am most concerned to preserve our self-confidence and our commitment to the democratic process within and our commitment to taking risks in our own discussion with one another. The issues before SSSP should always be open wounds. Next, we are living through a particular time when the study of social problems has been routinized and institutionalized. Many activities of the 60s have either subsided or been domesticated. A great deal of work on social problems now represents points of view of sponsors and clients. Much of it has become procedural and methodological. The goal of getting the news out to the people has taken a back seat not only to the endemic problem that academics talk to each other, but also to the more restricted way the news comes out in technological reports and inter-office memoranda of the sponsoring agencies. Therefore it is tailored to their needs. Not that that activity shouldn't go on or that SSSP shouldn't have a role, but we should keep them honest—as an extra-institutional reference group. But as more and more social-problems work is done under their auspices, we become one of the few centers of independent study of social problems—where our sponsoring agency is history and society.

The SSSP has to provide a home for those who go against the tide and have preserved a sense of mission from the 60s and who are engaged in the classic scholarly route to research as independent students.

We have to avoid some things. Our primary responsibility is to be cheerful, in particular, to avoid the defeating attitudes of grandiosity. Because we are a small association of academics who only agree on a few things, we are not likely to be in the vanguard of the transformation of society. We, as a learned society, will never seize state power and shouldn't waste time repining. After all, it's a good thing we can't seize state power; nothing in our role entitles us to it. Every theory of revolution I ever had any respect for gives a central role to the people anyway. We are not yet their legitimate political arm.

The other kind of grandiosity to be avoided is one we have already been made sensitive to: the flattery of establishment centers of power.

Finally, we have to avoid the despair implicit in the notion that we are therefore irrelevant, as though the only alternative to absolute dominance is impotence.

One final thing is especially important for this period of history. From the 60s, we found out that all of social problems ultimately are traced to the basic contradiction in the underlying structure of society. But it would be a mistake to turn our backs to the details of need and the small-scale situations where human suffering is high and people live out their lives. It is a mistake to find all those things irrelevant. In contrast to most who take as their business what's wrong with society, we have to keep alive analyses and concern not only with underlying root causes but with how consequences work themselves out in detail.

Because our posture on society requires us always to keep our sensitivities keen, we must guard against decline into sentimentalizing through breast-beating and perpetual outrage. There are three things wrong with perpetual outrage: One, it is not informative. Two, it predisposes us to rash actions for the sake of just doing something; but we often find these actions more harmful than good because they are based on the need to do something rather than a good idea about what to do. Three, it engages our energies more in relation to our own feelings than to the reality we were originally concerned with. It is exactly because outrage and identification with real suffering are so fundamental and important to what we do that we have to guard against entrapment in excess.